

# The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust

Fighting Poverty – Feeding Families

Registered Charity No: 1096814

## Winter 2025



It seems impossible to imagine that yet another year has come to an end. It has been another busy and fulfilling year with plenty of highs and lows along the way, but we are still here and achieving what we set out to do, thanks to you, our supporters and some very generous donors.

Recruiting volunteer administrators/nurses has become increasingly complex. For the past year, our staff have managed perfectly well on their own, which is a significant step forward in terms of sustainability. It is wonderful that they continue to perform miracles and acts of heroism daily. We have been fortunate to have a young vet, Rumaysa, join us; she is very much part of the veterinary team rather than working on the admin side. She is a big help to us, and we feel lucky to have her.

Animal Welfare is becoming more widely recognised in The Gambia. As a result, we have become a bustling centre, with not only day-to-day treatments, which have increased dramatically, but also student training, school visits, riding for disabled children, and training workshops for different communities. We also seem to be on the tourist trail, as we are welcoming far more visitors now. We welcome visitors between 10 am and 4 pm, but we have recently had visitors arrive at 7 am and after we have closed for the day, which is less convenient for us. We feel people should be free to see the work we do and how we spend donors' money; however, we are a working centre, and we cannot always be available to show people around. We always prioritise our patients' needs.

We have treated more animals than ever before, and our team has had a hectic year. More and more people now know about us and care enough to report animals to us. Our vehicles are out constantly attending to road traffic accidents, and sick animals, and we have treated animals from all over the country. We have treated on average 47 equines at our monthly mobile clinics alone making a total of 564, in addition to all the call outs and patients who are brought to us for help, which are several thousand.

We are delighted that we recently made a significant step forward in bringing help to the much-abused dump site donkeys, which you can read about in this newsletter. Even as we go to press, the team has today been working with the dump site donkeys and has treated a recorded total of 75 donkeys, but it is possible that it could have been as many as 80, as Demba, who was recording, could not keep up!

We thank you for your magnificent support this year, wish you a very Happy Christmas, and we hope that the New Year will be happy and healthy for you and for the world. We hope you enjoy our newsletter.



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## Letter from the Director, Heather Armstrong.

Greetings,

I am writing this letter whilst in The Gambia. It is frightening how quickly the years pass. I am so proud of our staff, they are now so professional and responsible and in addition to taking care of their patients, they are willing to share their knowledge with others and to teach students from the College and University. They are an excellent team.

I was very honoured to receive an MBE in the King's Birthday honours this year. We had a few challenges at the beginning of the year, which had left me feeling a little fragile, but it is incredible how much of a morale boost this honour gave me. The King was very interested in what we were doing and I was so honoured to meet him. He asked searching questions. It is lovely to feel appreciated, but what we have achieved is very much a team effort, and it is the hard work of our dedicated staff that has enabled me to receive it.

It has been a fulfilling year and I have been privileged to see Zahra, the Afghan vet who came to us in difficult circumstances, flourish and pass her MRCVS exam after a great deal of hard work. She also became engaged to a lovely man. We were able to help another young lady, Stella, achieve her dreams and gain a place at The University of Leeds, with huge thanks to an International Foundation that kindly sponsored her education. Some incredibly kind individuals, including one of our Trustees, David Marsden, played their part in helping Stella and we are very grateful to them.

Feeding so many animals is a constant worry, we simply could not do it without the generous help of ALFS, Animal Support Angels, Carola Rohricht, Nien Ke and Unser Afrika Project. These organisations/individuals all have strong, determined and very compassionate animal-loving women working their magic for animals all over the world, and they have our utmost love, gratitude and respect.

We have always tried to be a charity that is not constantly requesting donations from our supporters, times are difficult for us all and we recognise that, however, when we have asked, you have all been more than generous with either gifts in kind or money donations and we are so very grateful for your wonderful support. We literally could not do it without you. Thank you so much!

*We wish you a healthy and happy Christmas. Let us hope that 2026 brings peace to the world, we can live in hope.*

Best wishes,

Heather.



## Calling all vets

We need more vets to volunteer, please. We have traditionally had equine vets and over the years these vets have trained our staff to a very high standard and have left an incredible legacy. We now need small animal and farm vets as we need to do a great deal of neutering and more and more owners are bringing their farm animals to us. It would be lovely to enhance and broaden the skills of the Government paravets who deal with the farm animals so that they are able to provide an improved service to their clients.



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## Visit to the Gambia Horse & Donkey Trust – 20 November 2025

I first heard about the Gambia Horse & Donkey Trust around seven years ago through a good friend, Virginia Rider, who has been collecting donations and supporting the charity for many years.

As someone who has run a respected equestrian business for over a decade, I've been fortunate to gather generous donations from our wonderful equestrian community and fellow business owners. Lillico County Store, in particular, has been outstanding in their continued generosity.

I arrived at the Trust at around 9 a.m. to find a hive of activity. Animals were being fed their breakfast, while others were receiving urgent care—wounds being cleaned, bandages changed, and treatments administered. My tour began in the treatment area, where the most severely injured dogs were being closely monitored, many of them on drips to keep them hydrated and stable.

I was invited to help walk the dogs to the river—around twenty to twenty-five of them. It was a truly beautiful sight: dogs who not long ago had been fighting for their lives now happy, running free, splashing at the water's edge, and chasing lizards. Seeing them living their best lives was nothing short of uplifting.

What struck me most was the sheer number of people involved. There are far more vets, helpers, and staff at the Trust than I ever imagined—an entire mini-army of angels, full of love, dedication, and compassion. The videos and photos shared on social media simply do not convey the scale of the work being done or the number of animals in their care. The experience was deeply humbling and emotional; I was in tears when I returned to my hotel.

Having now seen the Trust firsthand, I understand even more clearly what is needed to support the staff and volunteers. Once I return home, I will be organising another shipment of donations, and I'm fully committed to doing everything I can to help go forward.

The Gambia Horse & Donkey Trust is a lifeline—for animals and for the people who care so deeply for them. I am honoured to play even a small part in supporting their incredible work.

Jo Hobbs



## Dr. Daffeh DVM

We are thrilled that Dr. Daffeh is now working for us on a part time basis. Dr Daffeh is a qualified vet with a special interest in epidemiology and has worked with us for many years advising us and lecturing our staff. He is passionate about animal welfare and has been the driving force behind the movement, working closely with the Animal Advocates and ourselves to promote animal welfare in The Gambia.

He is an extraordinary man and we are privileged to have him as part of our team.



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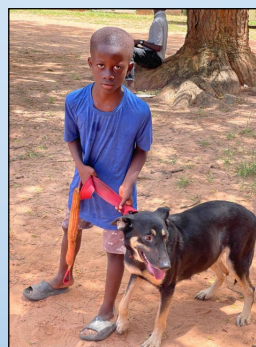
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## World Animal Day and World Rabies Day.

World Rabies Day and World Animal Day are just a week apart. This year, we joined with the Animal Advocates and the Live-stock Services Department to celebrate in style. We set up vaccination stations all over the country and we vaccinated well over 1000 dogs. There were several radio programmes on the subject of Rabies, and many people phoned in, so we were very encouraged by the response.

For World Animal Day, we held an event at our centre at Makasutu with the Animal Advocates and a number of dignitaries. It was a joyful day and we had the scout band providing music. The media was out in force and the message we were sending out was featured on the TV news. Once again, we had many phone-in radio programmes and many people called to express their thoughts on how we could improve the situation and urged the Government to improve the laws for animal welfare. There is a definite change in attitude from every level of society. We were delighted that our event was graced with many VIP's including our Ambassador, The very well known and talented Kora player and musician, Jaliba Kuyateh who does so much to promote animal welfare in The Gambia.



## Alex Thiemann MRCVS

We are thrilled to welcome Alex Thiemann, MRCVS, onto our board of Trustees. Alex was one of the first vets to volunteer with us, and she has returned several times over the years. She has a combination of perfect skills for the job after working with donkeys for many years and she understands the importance of looking at the bigger picture and understanding the needs of both the animals and their owners.



## Lazarus

The motivation for founding our charity was a horse called Lazarus. He was found by Stella, our co founder, in appalling condition and he transformed from an ugly duckling into a magnificent swan. He lived with us for 18 years and his kind but mischievous temperament touched us all. He continues to inspire us and he is much missed. Judy Goodman, a very talented artist, whose work I have much admired at Hickstead, Kindly painted his portrait for us and has captured him perfectly. He will have pride of place at our Makasutu centre, reminding us of how we began. Judy's details are included here in case anyone would like to contact her.



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## Professor Max Murray.

We were very sad at the passing of Professor Max Murray, who had been one of our Trustees for many years and had been very supportive as we established our charity. He was a highly distinguished and influential figure in the veterinary world, and his achievements would require the whole newsletter to list. He was a very special person, and had an ability to inspire so many, but to us, he was a very dear family friend and wonderful Trustee and we miss him so much. Our thoughts are with his lovely wife, Christine and his family.



## Zahra.

Many of you will remember Zahra, a vet, who came to us from Afghanistan, thanks to the generosity of past vet volunteers. Her plight was brought to our attention by a volunteer vet, Graham Duncanson who had been mentoring her. The Gambia kindly gave her asylum and we raised the money to get her to The Gambia by asking all past volunteer vets to chip in for a colleague in distress. Within 18 hours of our private appeal, we had sufficient funds to get her out of Afghanistan, and to The Gambia. The veterinary profession has had a lot of bad press recently but so many came to Zahra's assistance in her time of need. Thanks to Vet Partners, she came to UK and studied for her MRCVS exams which she recently passed. After years of misery and distress since the Taliban took over, Zahra has a double cause for joy as not only did she pass her exam, but she recently became engaged to her lovely Reza. After the traumas and stress of recent years, it is so beautiful to see her joy.



## Stella.

Stella, who was named after our co-founder, came to work with us during her gap year. Her education had been sponsored by our sister charity Stella's School Scheme. She had done well at school and had been offered a partial scholarship at the University of Minnesota in the USA. Unfortunately, due to political developments, she was unable to take up this offer. We suggested that she try UK, at the time we were unaware how expensive it would be. She was very successful with her applications and was offered a place at Leeds University. We were fortunate to find sponsorship from a wonderful International Foundation, which has undertaken to cover her whole University career, provided she has good grades and uses her knowledge to help her country. Stella is now at Leeds and is enjoying it, despite the cold.



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## Justice for Jambarr

In the 23 years that have passed since our charity was established, there has been a huge change of attitude to animal welfare in The Gambia. This is as a result of a collaboration with the fantastic Animal Welfare Advocates and the remarkable Dr. Kebba Daffah who works tirelessly for the welfare of animals.

We receive many complaints and comments about the welfare of the dump site donkeys and have many in our hospital as patients. The donkey drivers tend to work them to exhaustion and then abandon them.

Recently, two members of our staff were moved to tears when they came across a badly beaten donkey who was actually bleeding from his wounds. He was immediately taken into the hospital for treatment. We named him Jambarr which means brave.

The donkeys are used for refuse collection and then have to take the refuse to the municipal dump. People from Mali operate them, and there is money to be made. Sadly, the donkeys don't seem to benefit from it and live miserable lives until they die of injury or exhaustion, having first been abandoned by their so-called carers.

We have tried working with the operators and training them, providing harnesses and bits, and it has helped a few donkeys and made an impression on a few operators. Still, it is not making enough difference to REALLY help the donkeys.

We were so incensed by the state of Jambarr that we decided to take things further. We initially reported the event to the police and obtained a case number. The staff took pictures of both the donkey and the man who injured it and then we (Dr. Daffeh, the Animal Welfare Advocates and GHDT) arranged a meeting with the Mayor of the Municipality responsible for the dump. The municipality has many complaints about the donkeys. Apart from the poor welfare, they have to pay for the removal of the dead donkeys, and although these operators are making a great deal of money, they are not paying taxes. The Mayor's office was very helpful, and we hope to all work together on this matter. They are in the process of registering all the dumpsite donkeys, and we are trying to encourage them to introduce number plates for the carts to make them more accountable and so that the public can report them if necessary. Following our meeting, we went straight to the police who could not have been more helpful. They accompanied us to the dumpsite where we met the two men in charge, Pa Ousman Fatty and Tamba,. They, too, were incredibly helpful and proactive and they showed us the pile of sticks that they had confiscated. The man's picture was circulated, telephone numbers exchanged, and a commitment to cooperate was begun. Within 48 hours he was apprehended and taken into custody. Our staff went into the police station to make statements and Rumaysa supplied a veterinary report on the condition of the donkey when he came in. The police are now hoping to prosecute him. We hope that this will send out a message to the donkey drivers that this kind of behaviour will not be permitted. We also hope to employ someone to be at the dumpsite regularly to monitor the donkeys. We shall hold regular mobile clinics in an attempt to improve life for these miserable animals.

**We are extremely grateful to all the people who have already donated pony sized headcollars, we desperately need pony size headcollars and small 4.5" bits please. They can be sent to the address at the foot of the page. We are determined to improve the quality of life for these donkeys.**



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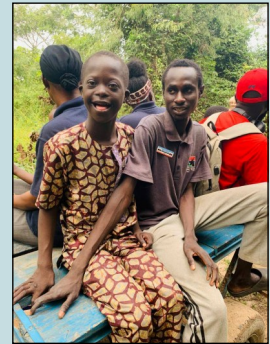
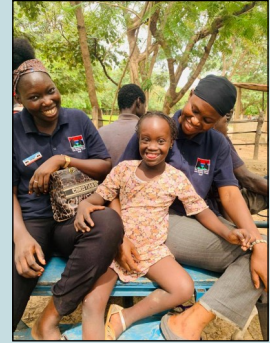
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## Riding for the disabled

We have a small group of donkeys who reside with us permanently. These are animals who are particularly close to our hearts, whose courage and will to survive despite the odds have amazed us. They are a group of walking miracles who have endured so much that we feel they have earned the right to permanent sanctuary with us. Our critics say we are carrying extra mouths to feed and that they should go out and work for a living. This little group is far too valuable for that. They remind us daily of what is possible and why we do what we do. To see them content and pain-free inspires us to keep trying. They also perform one of the most valuable parts of our work: providing rides and driving for disabled children and serving as ambassadors to the thousands of schoolchildren who visit us each year. The children brush them and fuss over them and learn that they are not merely beasts of burden but living, sentient creatures with their own personalities. The joy they bring to their disabled friends is lovely to behold. Each donkey is sponsored, so their costs are covered, and they do not use charity funds. I would urge those who criticise to see the bigger picture and realise that this little group is possibly performing the most important work of any donkeys in The Gambia.



**Thank you, thank you, thank you.**

Sadly, we cannot thank everyone individually, but we are so grateful for the incredible support that we have received this year from so many wonderful people. It is not just the donations of money or goods, but the kind words of support and encouragement when our spirits are flagging that mean so much to us. We would like to give sincere thanks to The Aqualia International Foundation, Vets with Horsepower, Scandivet, Millpledge, The BEVA Foundation, The team at the All England Show Jumping ground at Hickstead, Unser Afrika Projekt, Carola Rohricht, Tina at ALFS, Amanda at Animal Support Angels, Sue Stage, Sue Ashton, Sue Ajax Lewis, Stella Fuller, John Burford, Mr. and Mrs R. Buining, Lillieco's Country Store and the many other wonderful people who have donated to us. We are more than grateful to you all and we deeply appreciate your support.

*Thank you*



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## Children.

We are pleased to have welcomed several thousand school children to our centres over the course of the year and we average two trips per week during term time. It is the perfect opportunity to show young people the benefits and charms of the animals in our care. They can groom the donkeys, play with the dogs, stroke the cats and feed Luke, our very gentle camel. We hope they will soon be taking a colouring/ story book with them and perhaps even some colouring pencils. We are working on it and will be looking for sponsorship for the book when we have more ideas of costs. We love having the children and the animals seem to enjoy it too.



## Fundraising.

### GIFT AID

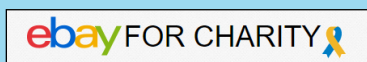
In these troubled times we are acutely aware that we could be gaining more from many of your donations. Donating through Gift Aid means charities can claim an extra 25p for every £1 you give. It will not cost you any extra. If you are a taxpayer, all you have to do is sign a Gift Aid form. We can even claim on donations you have paid in the past. We do not have Gift Aid forms for many of the people who pay by BACS for example and on our last claim, we could have claimed an extra £10,000 at no cost at all to you. If you have not signed a Gift Aid form, please consider doing so, because it will increase your donation considerably.

For more information on Gift Aid, please go to <https://www.gov.uk/donating-to-charity/gift-aid>.

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### FUNDRAISING

Just a few ways you can raise funds for us:



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